Altoona Middle School

Master Schedule

By: Jamie Oliver

**Rationale**

The Altoona School District has approximately 1,500 students walk thru its doors each day. For the past 10 years we have run as 3 conventional buildings, connected by a simple walkway and several shared staff. The shared staff has allowed the district to reduce the number of teachers needed in our “specials” or elective classes. This has saved a lot of money for the district, but has also put each individual building in a very difficult situation when it came to scheduling. Each building had to work with one another to allow these elective teachers to travel from building to building. This has really handcuffed the buildings and has not allowed them to do the creative and innovative scheduling necessary to meet the needs of the students. Now for the 2013-2014 school year we will be moving our fourth graders to the middle school to form a project based learning school. This section of the middle school will be on a completely different schedule than the sixth – eighth graders. We also need to add in the daily time periods for RtI or Response to Intervention. So the scheduling piece is crucial to the success of the new intermediate school and our current middle school.

I have volunteered to be on the scheduling committee and will be leader of the committee. It is helpful for me to be on this committee as I am one of the current shared staff teachers. I will be attending our bi-weekly scheduling meetings, as well as attending the all day workshop at an area Department of Public Instruction spotlight school. The changes we will be making may be very drastic, but will always be in the best interest of the students in our school. This is a great experience for me as I will gain valuable knowledge in the scheduling competency of my administrative licensure.

**Competencies Met**

Our scheduling committee was made up of four classroom teachers, two special education teachers, our middle school principal, middle/high school dean of students, a secretary, and three specials teachers. All of the participants volunteered to be on the committee and were actually part of a larger group that was broken into building level teams. We began meeting in October and continued regular meetings throughout the school year until a schedule was finalized in April.

**October 29, 2012**

We started the process by giving the staff an online survey. We wanted to hear what the staff thought about our current schedule looked like and what changes they may like to see take place in the future.

Sampling of our questions:

1. What is an appropriate number of students to have in a class?
2. What percentage of a student’s day should be spent in each of the core classes?
3. How should exploratory classes be taught in relation to other classes?
4. What would be the ideal length of time for our target time?
5. How can we best utilize target time?
6. When should foreign language first be taught to students?

Some of the answers we received from the survey were:

1. The exploratory classes should be shorter blocks of time than academics.
2. The current way is sufficient.
3. Exploratory classes should be at the end of the day.
4. Extra time for excelling students to take an exploratory class would be great.
5. Target time should be 20 minutes of silent reading, 20 minutes of math or science re-teaching of the current day’s lesson, and no more than 3-4 students per instructor.
6. We need longer time for the math, reading/language arts. Extend the day.

Once the survey was completed we divided the committee into groups to break down the data. We analyzed the data from the survey and looked for common threads and consistent messages from staff members. We shared our findings with the committee at our next meeting.

* **Decision Making 1 processes and theories**
* **Decision Making 5 long range strategic plans**
* **Decision Making 8 change process**
* **Decision Making 9 conflict resolution models**
* **Research 3 quantitative data**
* **Research 3 qualitative data**
* **Learner Centered Leader 8 communicate vision, mission**

**November 14, 2012**

One of the first steps to creating a master schedule was to divide our academic teachers into their respective grade level teams. We knew that we would need four teachers per team and our current eighth grade team was at five teachers. Unfortunately we knew one of them would need to be relocated into another grade level or another academic area in the building. Then I gave the task of coming up with two or three must haves in the schedule. Each member of the committee needed to come back to the next meeting with a list of absolutes that we needed for our schedule. This could have been longer class periods, a homeroom time, study hall, target time, or maybe even a specific class that we offer.

Once this was done we looked at all of our specials classes that we are currently offering to students in grades 5-8. We needed to determine which classes would be kept, cut, or simply adjusted. We also looked at the requirements from the Department of Instruction and what they required of the schools, specifically minutes taught and grade levels for each subject. What we found was very alarming, we were short in minutes for several classes and were teaching some unnecessary things in other areas. This was a huge red flag for us and we knew that this is where we had to really start the scheduling process. We also adopted a new math curriculum this past year that recommends sixty minute lessons and we were currently in a forty five minute class period. So the math department was struggling to cover the material in the allotted time per day.

We also looked at the Common Core Standards and the state report card to address any changes within our curriculum that would affect our daily schedule.

* **Leadership 1 servant, moral, collaboration**
* **Leadership 5 change process**
* **Leadership 9 effective communication**
* **Curriculum/Instruction 3 standards**
* **Curriculum/Instruction 4 planning and development**
* **School Community 7 accountability for progress**

**November 29, 2012**

We continued the discussion with our current course offerings and the current minimum allocated instruction time set by the DPI.

We then analyzed our current schedule and looked at some models from schools around our area that had a similar student body as Altoona Middle School.

Lastly on this day we considered any curriculum changes that may need to be made. One of the considerations was to have a class called “words your way” eliminated and that curriculum added to the language arts classes. It was a spelling class and we felt that it could easily be tied into the language arts/reading curriculum.

* **Curriculum/Instruction 3 standards**
* **Curriculum/Instruction 4 planning and development**
* **School Community 7 accountability for progress**
* **Principalship 2 manager vs leader**
* **Research 9 program evaluation**

**December 13, 2012**

We sent a team of teachers to Onalaska High School earlier in the week and discussed the report they brought back. Onalaska uses a modified eight period day with a rotating block schedule. After a short discussion we decided that would not be best for our middle school. We then shifted our discussion to the must have list that each teacher was assigned to complete.

Must haves:

1. 60 minute math class
2. Increase of all academic areas to meet DPI recommendations
3. Homeroom at the beginning of the day
4. Start and end the day with the same teacher
5. Target time at the end of the day
6. Team time
7. PLC time
8. Keep all current full time staff
9. Fewer transitions
10. Gym usage/during lunch
11. Specials mixed in between academics
12. Less shared staff
13. Keyboarding everyday

Many of the items were agreed upon by several different staff members and reasons why were expressed. No one disagreed; we just weren’t sure how we can give everyone their must haves without a drastic change in the daily schedule. One thing that I really liked was the proposal for a thirty minute enrichment/intervention time at the end of the day. During this half hour block of time *ALL* staff would be in contact with students. I added the fact that the more staff we include, the lower the number of students working with each teacher. This would also include all of the staff on this important part of the student’s day.

* **Leadership 6 integrity, ethics, fairness**
* **Principalship 1 role, history**
* **Decision Making 3 consensus**
* **Principalship 7 school reform**

**Jan 24, 2013**

Our goals for this day were to review the staff suggested changes, look at schedules that align with our district and school goals and get initialize plans for the Stanley Boyd trip.

We targeted four main changes from the staff.

1. Added minutes for the core classes.
2. Add an intervention/enrichment time.
3. Retain all of our specials, especially those required by the DPI.
4. Incorporate PLC, Professional Learning Community, time.

Each of these would be addressed as we began looking at some schedules from Stanley Boyd, Appleton Public Schools, a charter school in Appleton, and an updated schedule from our high school. None of the schedules was an exact fit for our size of a school and none were anything that any of the committee fell in love with. After much deliberation we decided to reflect on what we have discussed up to this point and then review these and any new items at our meeting the following week.

* **Decision Making 8 change process**
* **School Community 1 school as an internal organization**
* **Learner Centered 1 school culture, climate**
* **Learner Centered 9 long range strategic plans**

**Jan 31, 2013**

We began this meeting by discussing how long of a period did we need our enrichment/intervention time to be. We knew that it would have to fall somewhere between thirty and forty five minutes, depending on what the other classes look like. We also agreed that our core classes of math, science, language arts, and social studies would be a minimum of sixty minutes and our specials would be just a little shorter than that. As a specials teacher I didn’t feel like this was a step back for specials because we would be maintaining our current minutes with the students. One area that we didn’t all agree on is the idea of a homeroom. Some teachers wanted the homeroom just before the enrichment/intervention time and others wanted right away in the morning. This seemed like a great place to stop and reflect on the day’s events and we would meet again in two weeks.

* **Research 9 program evaluation**
* **Decision Making 1 processes and theories**
* **Decision Making 3 consensus**
* **Leadership 2 organization vision**
* **Leadership 7 safe, effective environment**

**February 13, 2013**

This was our official visit to the Stanley Boyd School District. Stanley Boyd is a DPI spotlight school. Stanley Boyd has been recognized for their academic success and is host to several school visits each year. As a future administrator I was also very impressed with the behavior and attitudes of the students. I was also given the opportunity to sit down with the middle/high school principal and talk for about two hours. We discussed scheduling, discipline, grading, and student privileges just to name a few things. Overall it was a great visit that we were able to get a lot out of. We came back with proven ideas on our enrichment/intervention time, along with PLC’s and some other intervention ideas.

* **Leadership 1 servant, moral, collaboration**
* **Leadership 3 context for leadership**
* **Leadership 5 change process**
* **Leadership 9 effective communication**
* **Facilities 3 operations, maintenance**
* **Facilities 9 technology**
* **Human Resources 3 staff development programs**
* **Human Resources 5 motivation**
* **Human Resources 9 community support**
* **School Community 9 service learning**

**February 14, 2013**

This meeting was cancelled due to a snow day.

**March 13, 2013**

We had a long break from our previous meeting because so many of our committee members are on other committees. Finding a common meeting time on short notice is impossible. Our principal came to the meeting with a copy of Holmen Middle School’s schedule. They are an eight section school with much of the same structure as we have in Altoona. We are a four section school so it was a very simple change of just one section for core classes versus their two sections. Their core classes were sixty minutes, which is exactly what we were looking for, and electives were forty five. It was actually really strange how it all worked out. Everybody really liked how they arranged their day and how the times worked out so well. Our enrichment/intervention time fit in neatly with everything else that we wanted to accomplish. Maybe it was just meant to be. The only thing left to do was put each class into a specific hour of the day. We did decide at this point that we would have the middle school move to a trimester grading system rather than the quarterly system we are currently using. Our guidance and principal have agreed to finalize the assignments of class hours and we would see the final product in the near future.

* **Leadership 2 organization vision**
* **Decision Making 3 consensus**
* **Decision Making 8 change process**
* **Curriculum/Instruction 3 standards**
* **Curriculum/Instruction 4 planning and development**
* **Curriculum/Instruction 5 implementation**
* **Admin of Curriculum 9 RtI**
* **School Community 4 sensitivity to families**
* **School Community7 accountability for progress**
* **Learner Centered 1 school culture, climate**
* **Learner Centered 8 communicate vision, mission**
* **Principalship 7 school reform**

**Supporting Research**

Ron Williamson says in his book, Scheduling schools: Tools for improved student achievement, A school’s schedule is one of the most powerful tools a principal can use to shape the instructional program. The schedule can facilitate or inhibit opportunity for teacher collaboration and can provide teaching teams with the flexibility they need to vary the length of classes and to accommodate a range of teaching strategies. With these ideas in mind administrators can make a schedule as a reflection of values and with purposeful and intentional strategies that will support accomplishing the things that are most important.

Michael D. Rettig wrote in his book Designing Quality Middle School Master Schedules, that scheduling the I/E Period is easy; organizing and structuring activity during the period requires significant preparation and constant monitoring and revision. All students must be productively engaged. The primary purpose is for Intervention/Enrichment, which may include extended learning time, re‐teaching, re‐testing, tutoring, etc. The best I/E periods are data‐driven by a strong formative assessment system. We have an excellent RtI and PBIS committee that collects excellent data and ties that directly into our instruction.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the must haves was team time with our core teachers. This was also reinforced by Donald G. Hackmann & Jerry W. Valentine in their article called Designing an Effective Middle Level Schedule. Hackmann and Valentine say the schedule should support interdisciplinary team organization. “The primary objective... is to facilitate the operation of those school programs determined to be advantageous in the education of middle school students”. We know the importance of collaboration and interdisciplinary discussions and we also knew that we had to keep this in our new middle school schedule.

# The Power of Innovative Scheduling by Robert Lynn Canady and Michael D. Rettig suggest that adding a nontraditional core teacher to the interdisciplinary team. For example at Glasgow Middle School in Fairfax County, Virginia, a foreign language teacher is now on each 8th grade interdisciplinary team. At other schools, related arts teachers are on teams on a rotating basis. An art teacher might be the fifth person on a team for nine weeks of art, followed by nine weeks of computer technology, nine weeks of teen living, and nine weeks of drama. Being part of the team increases the likelihood that the content of these exploratory subjects will be integrated with the core. We often overlook the valuable asset of our specials staff and neglect using them to truly benefit the students.

# Moving to longer schedule blocks can also help schools focus more on depth in the curriculum and active student engagement. But unless teachers get substantial time to develop and reflect on new practices-and unless the needs of students drive the use of time-a long-block schedule won't accomplish much.Using Time Well: Schedules in Essential Schools by [Kathleen Cushman](http://www.essentialschools.org/resources/list?search%5Bresource_authors_author_id_equals%5D=3) discusses that we cannot add minutes to a daily schedule and expect teachers to lift the students to a higher level if they are never given adequate time to improve their current curriculum and daily lessons. The debate would then lead to whether they get time during the day or extra time outside of the regular school day.

**So What?**

I knew that scheduling is always a hot topic, especially when it comes to making major changes. I also knew that as a future administrator this would be an invaluable experience and an opportunity I could not pass up. Another reason I wanted to be on this committee and really dive into the scheduling process was to be a voice for the specials classes. There is always such an emphasis on the academics, that the specials just get put in wherever there is an open slot. We have had issues of gym space in the past because of this very reason. I feel very confident that we have created a master schedule that will benefit students and allow our staff to reach their full potential as educators. We are giving them extra time in the academic classes, continuing our specials offerings, maintaining team time, incorporating PLC’s and allowing for our enrichment/intervention time. I really believe we have listened to the staff and were able to meet all of the must haves while not leaving others behind. Overall I am excited to see how the schedule runs next year, as well as get feedback from staff about the proposed plan.